

## Avram Merkado Natan With His Second Wife Simha Solomon Natan (nee Aladjem) At The Vitosha Mountain Near Sofia



My second wife Simha Solomon Natan (nee Aladjem) and I at the Vitosha Mountain near Sofia in 2000. Most of my friends are Bulgarians, but my wife's relatives are Jews. We organized a Jewish tourist club in 'Maccabi'. Now it still exists, although 'Maccabi' is no longer active. Everyone who wants comes to our club - Bulgarians, a Greek, two Armenians and a Russian woman came with us. We walk in the mountains. In the winter we go to Vitosha. In the spring we go to the Lozen Mountain, Plana Mountain and other places [all of them are mountains near Sofia]. We go out on Saturdays. Before I was a mountain guide - I knew the routes and organized groups to walk in Pirin, Stara Planina, Rila. Now, I go to the mountains with close friends, Bulgarians, whom I met 32 years ago on a trek in Rila Mountain. We still keep in touch and get together. Some time ago we went to the mountains a lot, but now not so often because one of our friends Georgi has the Parkinson's disease. Every Monday and Wednesday we play bridge in the Jewish cultural home. We are a group of four people, and one man who plays with us when someone is missing. We usually play backgammon the other days. As for my relatives I keep in touch mostly with the cousins of my wife Simha. I meet my brother sometimes, but he is very busy, because he has to take care of his wife Yanka. I also call my cousin Avram Pinkas. But most of my relatives are in Israel. I went there before 1989. In 1965 I went to Israel with the Bulgarian national football team - we were in one group with Israel and I went there for two days and a half. It was then that I decided to emigrate. I am not such a great football fan, but I had helped the son of a friend of mine, who was a student. My friend had connections and arranged my trip as a way to thank me. So, I agreed to go there for a couple of days to see my aunts and uncles. I had never been to Israel before that. My cousin and his friend there offered me to emigrate and convinced me that I would have a nice job. But I could not do it, and I already explained the reason. [It was because he had designed installations for Bulgarian military plants and was not allowed by the authorities.] I was alone on my trip and in the end of 1989 I went for a week to celebrate the New Year's Day - the first year after the changes. In

1997 Simha and I went together - her daughters also emigrated to Israel - they have families and two children each. Their names are Adela and Luiza. Adela is a nurse and Luiza works in a bank. I had to help my son and his wife, because she was studying. He works in a construction company and she is an accountant so I had to look after their children. Simha was at her daughters'. We stayed there for three months. Nobody harassed me because of my Jewish origin. But I was very angered by the attitude towards the wars in Israel in 1967 and 1973 and the breaking of the diplomatic ties with Israel. That was a policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party, which disappointed me a lot. Because I had been to Israel and I had seen how they worked and how people became real men there. There was no industry in Israel yet, people were building with primitive technologies. Their settlements were green gardens and between them - deserts. People had a lot of enthusiasm. So, I could not accept the idea that they were aggressors. A colleague of mine, Tihomir Stanev, met me at that time, one or two days after the war in 1967 ended. He hugged me, kissed me, and said, 'Avram, I heard that you were wise people, you are a handful of people and you scared so many Arabs.' That was the only man who greeted me warmly, but the propaganda was unpleasant. The other colleagues did not change their attitude towards me. They were very tactful about the war in 1967. I did not have problems keeping in touch with my relatives in Israel. My uncle David, who was the youngest, came to visit me in Bulgaria. I only had some problems when I returned from Cuba. My former director, Marin, with whom I went on excursions, offered me a job. He worked in the Institute for casting using anti-pressure of Academician Angel Balevsky . But the institute was secret at that time. And Marin's condition to employ me was that I should not keep in touch with any foreigners. I had to sign a declaration. I told him that I had so many relatives in Israel and I had to keep in touch with them. So, I went to another institute - the Hydrotechnics and Melioration Institute. And my relatives continued to visit me. After the changes in 1989 I was disappointed - the mistakes which were made before that were exaggerated. That fierceness between the parties was very unpleasant.